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ABSTRACT

It is noted that a common belief among native Japanese-speakers is that it is not necessary to be polite when speaking English, despite the fact that politeness is seen as a Japanese cultural attribute. Researchers have also noted this discrepancy. A study investigated how Japanese secondary school textbooks for English as a Second Language (ESL) treat the issue of politeness in speech, one aspect of pragmatic competence. A list of conventional, formal linguistic markers (lexical, morphological, syntactic/semantic) of politeness was prepared for both English and Japanese. Eighteen ESL textbooks in use in Japan over the last decade, two recently-published texts conforming to revised curriculum standards, and other foreign-published textbooks were analyzed for explicit attention to politeness. None was found. This is attributed to the written orientation of some textbooks and to the kinds of interactional discourse presented in textbooks. In addition, incorrect or distorted translations of English were found. Further factors in lack of pragmatic training are identified, including the nature of classroom interactions and systemic differences in treatment of politeness issues in Japanese and English. However, it is argued that for developmental reasons, secondary school is an appropriate place to teach pragmatics, including politeness. Contains 26 references. (MSE)

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POLITENESS AND PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

By Virginia LoCastro, International Christian University

Anecdotal evidence indicates that native speakers of English are uncomfortable with what they perceive to be the lack of linguistic politeness forms in the speech of Japanese speakers of English. A common example is found in the expression of desires and wants, when a Japanese speaker will say "I want X," rather than "I'd like to X." This paper will report on an analysis of evidence of the teaching of politeness in junior and senior high school textbooks. The analysis is followed by six possible explanations for the lack of attention and the low pragmatic competence in this area of language use on the part of Japanese learners and speakers of English.

INTRODUCTION

One rather pervasive myth amongst Japanese speakers and learners of English is that it is not necessary to be polite when speaking English, that, in fact, directness is required, and, furthermore, that Westerners in general are less "polite" than Japanese are. This is a strong belief, based on stereotypes which one can hear readily articulated by Japanese speakers and learners of English.

An equally strong stereotype is that Japanese are always very "polite." However, the perception of Westerners living and working in Japan is that Japanese speakers and learners of English are not always polite. This seems to be so even in circumstances of status, age, and power differences where deference and linguistic markers of politeness would be required in Japanese, and expected in English, for example, in an interaction between a professor and a student. University students will say directly, "I want you to correct/check my paper for me" to a professor.

So, the question is: Why is this so? Does the myth or stereotype explain the behavior? Or does the stereotype provide a rationalization for the behavior, giving speakers/learners the excuse not to bother, so to speak, with politeness?

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I decided to investigate this particular aspect of the pragmatic competence of Japanese speakers of English (see Bachman, 1989), and found I quickly got into complex territory as indeed one does with any attempts to understand politeness, particularly from an intercultural point of view. Yet, there is a clear need to expand our ability to understand and explain pragmatic competence. Second/foreign language education is now being asked to facilitate the development of learners' "intercultural communicative competence," in particular "intercultural communication awareness" (Dirven and Putz, 1993:152). In order to do so, language educators must have knowledge of the range and the stages of development of the pragmatic competence of learners and of the ethnic stereotyping which seems to accompany interlanguage variation.

In this paper, I will first of all explain my initial efforts to look at language textbooks used in junior and senior high schools to teach English in Japan. Then I will propose six possible explanations for the lack of attention in the textbooks to this aspect of pragmatic competence. This is background work for a data-based study of the acquisition of linguistic politeness markers. Finally, I will briefly suggest a course of action for language educators in the context of English language education in Japan.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE) TEXTBOOKS

My original intention was to look into the possibility that Japanese learners of English are not taught how to use the most frequent, common means to show politeness linguistically in English. In other words, they do not learn the resources of the English language well enough.

Previous studies have been carried out concerning the use of politeness by Japanese learners and speakers of English. These studies have looked at both the perception and production of politeness markers. Tanaka and Kawade (1982) found no correlation between the ability to

perceive politeness and corresponding pragmatic competence. Fukushima and Iwata (1987)'s study also cites a lack of correlation as their informants were not able to adjust the level of politeness to their interlocutors (teachers vs. fellow students) in their discourse questionnaire completion task. Hill, Ide, Ikuta, Kawasaki, and Ogino (1986) looked at the underlying motivations of politeness in Japanese and in American English; however, their study is not directly relevant to my concerns here. Kitao et al. (1987) compared the perceptions of Japanese EFL students in Japan and in the United States and the results show the Japanese students in the States have perceptions of politeness more similar to those of American students than those in Japan. Comparing Japanese with Australians, Tanaka (1988) found that her Japanese speakers used more negative politeness strategies than Australian speakers of English and were unable to style shift according to their interlocutors. Takahashi and DeFon (1989) found Japanese EFL learners tend to style shift from less direct to more direct requesting behavior, considered to be the opposite of what native speakers of English students do. A more directly relevant study is that of Fukushima (1990), who concludes on the basis of her study of offers and requests with learners at a university in Japan that the pragmatic competence of Japanese learners of English needs to be developed.

It is difficult to draw any clear insights. I would argue that studies done in the U.S. or in other ESL environments with Japanese learners may not provide information relevant for the situation in Japan as any results would be influenced by residence abroad of the informants. It is necessary to clarify the needs of Japanese speakers of English within the settings where they function on a daily basis using English as a language of international communication. Japanese ESL learners in target language environments are in a subordinate, powerless position; we need to be

concerned about the possible differences in their learning goals and in language use dependent on the context of situation.

None of the studies deal with the causes of the low pragmatic competence of Japanese speakers of English. As most Japanese have learned their English in classrooms, one plausible hypothesis is that the teaching is somehow inadequate and/or inappropriate. However, as it is very difficult to collect data on what teachers actually do in their classrooms, I decided to analyze the MOE-mandated textbooks for junior and senior high school English. My decision was based on the assumption that Japanese junior and senior high school teachers teach the linguistic content, i.e. the curriculum, in these materials, without deviating to any great degree from the mandated course of study. Clearly, individual teachers may add to the MOE structurally-based curriculum embedded in the materials, yet the general understanding is that this is unlikely (1).

In order to have a baseline for my analysis, I prepared the following list of features, that is, formal, linguistic markers of politeness, adapted from Lakoff,1972 and Carrell and Konneker,1981, among others:

CONVENTIONAL, FORMAL CATEGORIES OF POLITENESS

English

Lexical: please, gladly, be happy to, etc.; forms of address
Syntactic/semantic: tags
negation
sentence type: declarative, imperative, interrogative
modals, tense of modals

Japanese

Lexical: formulaic expressions, for eg., doozo yoroshiku onegaishimasu; forms of address, verbs of giving and receiving
Lexical/morphological: honorifics, including verb endings; choice of verb, prefixes, particles
Syntactic/semantic: sentence type: declarative, imperative, interrogative

One area which is neglected in this study is the role of phonological features, in particular intonation, in signalling politeness. There is a need for further research on this topic.

With a Japanese colleague, I selected and examined 18 textbooks of senior high school English. This is the list of textbooks I examined: *Milestone* I, II, IIB; *Unicorn* I, II, IIB; *New Crown* I, II, IIB; *New Horizon* I, II, IIB; *A New Guide to English Composition* IIC; *Mainstream* I, II, IIB; *In English Please* IIA; and *New Creative Conversation* IIA. (2) The system of roman numerals and letters indicates that these textbooks are used to teach the following skills: I= Multiskills (all four skills); IIA = Listening and Speaking; IIB = Reading; and IIC = Composition. For English IIA, I noted that there are relatively few available. This situationally-based textbook, rather than having students understand English through Japanese as the others do, is designed to develop listening and speaking skills. However, few teachers are prepared to teach situationally-appropriate language; the reasons are that (1) few have been trained to teach communicative language skills and, moreover, (2) few have the communicative competence in the language and the confidence in their ability to do so.

I chose textbooks which reflect those which have been in use over the last decade and not the newer ones which have been developed recently to meet the guidelines of the new MOE courses of study (*Foreign Languages*, 1989, 1990). My rationale was that current university students and adults had been taught with the previously used materials. It would be a different study to look at the newer textbooks, as presumably the new teaching materials would reflect the changes towards the development of communicative competence in the new curriculum for junior and senior high school English.

The original plan of counting the frequencies of occurrence of the linguistic forms of politeness was quickly abandoned as I found the

frequency of occurrence of the linguistic markers of politeness to be so low as to be insignificant. I had anticipated finding lessons or parts of lessons where politeness is taught, i.e. as a teaching point of a lesson, as well as tokens in the texts where politeness forms appear, but without attention drawn to them. Here is an example of what I mean by linguistic markers of politeness embedded in a passage in a textbook.

> Receptionist: May I help you?
> Student: Yes, I'm looking for information on courses in computer programming?...
> Receptionist: You can register...
> Student: Thank you.
> Receptionist: You're very welcome.
>
> (From *New Guide*,2nd edition,186)

I had also expected to find explanations for teachers in the manuals accompanying the materials. I did find some tokens of politeness in reading passages and in the dialogues; however, in the textbooks I examined I did not find "politeness" taught explicitly at all. My hypothesis that politeness is not taught was born out. The next step was to try to explain it.

Due to this lack of evidence of explicit attention to politeness in the current textbooks, I examined two of the new textbooks, which are based on the revised MOE courses of study. They are designed to teach Oral Communication A and B. However, I did not find indications of the changes I was expecting. I then decided to look at the actual MOE courses of study, the English language version. I looked for evidence of the direct teaching of politeness and found that the only sign of attention to pragmatic competence is, arguably, in the use of such words as "appropriately" or "proper", i.e. in statements such as that students are to be taught "To respond appropriately to questions, instructions, requests, and suggestions" (*Foreign Languages*,1989:1). In addition, "Effective ways of expressing suggestions and opinions...should be taught." (*Foreign Languages*,1990:6) Now, these words can be interpreted differently, not signalling necessarily

any direct concern for politeness and there is no gloss, explanation or examples for the Japanese teachers of English as to how the MOE understands those words are to be interpreted.

A quick look at foreign published textbooks does not result in a significantly different picture. Azar's *Understanding and Using English Grammar*, second edition, 1989, is one exception as it does list modals and similar expressions with comments for the teacher and students about politeness and levels of politeness. A check of some others indicates that there is an effort to develop an awareness that the use of certain expressions varies according to the context, which includes one's conversational partners (see Doff, et al.,1983:44). However, explicit, deductive teaching of politeness does not seem to be one of the aims of foreign published textbooks either.

The question still remains concerning the lack of attention to politeness in Japanese English language teaching: Why is this so? What anthropological, linguistic, developmental, methodological evidence can I bring to bear in this context which may help us understand? I will now suggest six possible explanations. Note that they are not mutually exclusive as undoubtedly there are multiple causes.

TEXTBOOKS

The MOE textbooks are problematic for two reasons. First of all, it is necessary to go back to the purpose for which English has been studied in Japan. Students are supposed to learn to read, for the purpose of getting information, and then learn to translate. The purpose of translation is to get information as well, but it is also viewed as a form of "intelligence training." The Hiraizumi-Watanabe controversy (Yoshioka,1986) reflects a questioning of English language training for purposes other than for the development of language competence. However, as long as reading and translation and

juken eigo (exam English) are prioritized, there is no need to learn how to be polite in English. Politeness is associated with speaking, i.e. oral skills, which continue to have a negative image in Japan.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find that the MOE textbooks are composed of "written" texts. The discourse type is literary, expository language use. Politeness is typically embedded in interactional discourse, and particularly in the context of certain kinds of speech acts (eg. requests, apologies). Thus, the textbooks, reflecting the purposes of EFL education in Japan, provide few if any opportunities for the learners to acquire linguistic markers of politeness or even to be exposed to it.

Secondly, the language in the textbooks may lead the students and teachers to misunderstandings about linguistic politeness as the forms of politeness which do appear in the texts do not provide appropriate models of language use. As mentioned above, there are some tokens of polite language behaviour, embedded in the various stories, dialogues, and other genres of texts in the textbooks. But an analysis of the passages and dialogues leads to an awareness that there tends to be three kinds of interactional discourse in the textbooks: (1) between intimates, i.e. people who are friends, (2) in situations where the power, status, and age differences are large, and (3) in male/female pairs or dyads.

None of these three situations, I would argue, provide examples of appropriate linguistic models of behavior concerning politeness for Japanese learners. In the first category, interactions between intimates, directness abounds, with imperatives and direct, clear disagreements. Only if a Japanese learner of English is a good friend of a non-Japanese would such directness be acceptable. In the second category, the large differences in status, age, and power mean that the older, higher status person, often a teacher or a parent, can also talk more directly to the other, often a student or child. The third category, of male/female dyads, again, I would suggest,

results in a distortion of normative behaviour in English as the degree of directness is only allowable if the two are close.

A particularly salient linguistic marker of politeness in English is modality. The MOE textbooks have numerous examples of modality, but it is taught to develop the learners' grammatical competence, especially their knowledge of conditionals. This focus on the conditional may represent cross-linguistic transfer as Japanese uses the conditional in contexts where English uses modals, for example, in the case of deontic modality, to signal sanctions or prohibitions.

Japanese:	*ha*	*migaka*	*nakaya,*	*dame*	*ne.*
	teeth	brush	if-not	is no good	+ particle
Literally:	If you don't brush your teeth, it's no good.				
Actual:	You must brush your teeth. / Brush your teeth.				

(Eg. from Akatsuka, Clancy, and Strauss,1993)

This example indicates an area of possible semantic and syntactical confusion: Japanese uses the conditional to convey meanings related to prohibitions while English uses modals to communicate the same meanings. In addition, the pragmatic force of the utterance is stronger and more direct in Japanese than in English. However, English uses modals in many more contexts than where the textbooks indicate they are used. Japanese learners may base their knowledge of modals for other purposes on the instances in which they appear in the translations in the conditional sentences.

A final comment on the language in the textbooks addresses the possibility that the learners may be exposed to incorrect translations of English:

(1) You had better go. = *Itta hoo ga ii. /Shita ho ga yoi.*

(2) I want you to do this. = *Shite hoshi.*

In both cases, the English so-called equivalent is stronger than the Japanese utterance. Yet these forms are found in the junior high school

textbooks. In addition, there is the fact that the MOE syllabus does not allow the teaching of "I would like to ..." before "I want to..." and students are taught that "had better" is a polite equivalent of "shita ho ga yoi." The pragmatic force of the Japanese, however, is not as strong as the English and should be translated as "It's a good idea to...." However, the learners tend to memorize these as unanalyzed chunks and it is difficult to eradicate these forms later even with teachers who are aware of the potential for sociopragmatic misunderstanding.

Thus, the textbooks themselves provide little exposure to appropriate models of language for the adolescent learners. Moreover, due to the focus on the development of grammatical competence, forms or patterns are presented without any attention to their roles in the development of pragmatic competence.

CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS

Second language acquisition research suggests that a certain amount of naturalistic acquisition can take place in classrooms through the interactions between teachers and students. The interactions may not be for explicit teaching purposes, but rather for classroom management and for friendly chat. However, as a source of input for the acquisition of politeness markers, this is problematic for two reasons. First, Kasper (1990) claims that classroom language is not necessarily exemplary of polite language; teachers can use imperatives without mitigation with impunity. Second, the value that could be derived from classroom talk precludes the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, i.e. the language of the classroom must be the target language. Anecdotal evidence as well as informal surveys continue to indicate Japanese teachers of English use Japanese 80-90% of the time. Thus, once again, there is little or no exposure to talk which would provide input useful for acquiring pragmatic competence.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONCERNS

We also need to look at politeness from the point of view of pragmatic development. Studies in English on L1 acquisition of politeness show that children as early as three years of age are able to use formulaic expressions of politeness, although it is not clear to what extent these expressions exist psycholinguistically only as memorized, formulaic chunks. Pre-school children use fewer politeness routines such as "thank you" and "please." It is not until the age of eight that there is modification of requests with different hearers (Snow et al.1993). (3)

As for L2 learners, there seems to be modality reduction in the utterances of beginning or intermediate learners, resulting in underdifferentiation and simplification. Politeness modality cues and others are presumably acquired later (Kasper,1979). If this is so, then it seems it is precisely the curriculum for the senior high school EL classes which should include lessons on modality and other politeness markers, not junior high school materials. One Japanese informant claims that what she knows at the age of 30+ about speaking English comes from junior high school and that senior high school was only for reading and translation.

SYSTEMIC DIFFERENCES

There are major systemic differences which become apparent in a comparison of the means for signalling politeness in Japanese and in English. As a result, what may happen for Japanese learning English is that the proverbial rug is pulled out from under their feet: all of a sudden it's open sea with no guide ropes. Politeness in Japanese involves obligatory lexical and morphosyntactic choices in the language, encoding the social norms concerning status, age, and gender.

In English, there are not the same obligatory choices. It is a matter of stylistic choice in English and not a question of grammar as it is in Japanese. Thus, the English politeness system becomes difficult to master linguistically due to the lack of correlates in the language for Japanese learners. There are some formulaic expressions, such as "thank you," "please," etc., which can be memorized, but other resources of the language to encode politeness are more problematic.

In addition to the lack of linguistic correlates, there are differences in the underlying beliefs concerning the formal marking of politeness in the two cultures. It is certainly true that American culture is status de-emphasizing and, therefore, ambiguous about signalling status differences linguistically. The fact that the social status differences are not cued as overtly in English as they are in Japanese does not mean, however, that they are not there. There are sanctions if a native English speaker mistakenly assumes that calling a professor by his/her first name means direct, bald-on-record requests can be made.

Thus, predictably, there are problems in intercultural communication because of differences in the range and variety of linguistic resources in the two languages to signal politeness and because of the different cultural norms and expectations concerning whether or not politeness is obligatory or optional. The high degree of optionality may lead to misunderstandings of the system of politeness in English

In examining the systemic differences, one consideration is the possibility of L1 pragmatic transfer from Japanese. Using data of naturally occurring talk, I found that there are relatively few formal markers of politeness in the speech of Japanese male speakers of English (LoCastro, 1993). Thus, transfer from Japanese norms may explain the perception that Japanese men are less polite in English than Japanese women. According to Smith (1992), Japanese men do use fewer markers of

politeness and lower level ones than women. In addition, it is the norm for males, when speaking with females with whom they are close or intimate, not to use polite language, whereas women are expected to do so. Thus, the dialogues embedded in the texts may reflect pragmatic transfer from Japanese to some extent.

DOMAINS

Japanese language use has clear, obligatory requirements about where and when to use which forms with whom. In contexts outside those where the norms hold, the situation can be quite different. For example, in terms of non-verbal behaviour, forms of public transportation and the areas around them do not require the same forms of polite behaviour as, for example, a posh restaurant. This distinction of domain occurs in language use as well. A Japanese informant claims that in service encounters in Japanese, politeness is not expected as it is in English. Waiters and waitresses, for example, require less linguistic politeness when they are addressed in particular kinds of restaurants in Japan. Thus, there may be a mismatch of linguistic and non-linguistic behavior and of domains in intercultural contexts.

THE LEARNABILITY QUESTION

In some studies done in the U.S. by Snow et al. (1990) on the acquisition of politeness in language use by children, the data show parents instructing children to use "thank you" and "please," most often by example, but also by metacommunicating that such forms are necessary. The authors come to no absolute conclusions, but suggest that it is in the interactions that children have with adults and in those which they observe that they learn about politeness. Parents use both modeling and direct teaching.

Concerning L2 acquisition of politeness, White (1993) claims that Japanese fossilize at junior high school level, learning formulaic expressions such as "please" and using them in all contexts even when, according to NS norms, it is inappropriate. It is not clear that pragmatic competence can be learned or acquired in formal, classroom instruction. Success in pragmatic competence development may require a target language learning environment. Yet in the EFL context of Japan, it does seem the teachers must bear the burden of making learners aware of the importance of pragmatic competence. The teachers, however, need help from textbook writers, publishers, and curriculum designers.

CONCLUSION

Two things seem clear. First of all, the ability to encode politeness minimally appropriately to meet the expectations of the norms of the target language is part of the L2 pragmatic competence of learners/speakers. Secondly, in terms of intercultural communication, lack of expected politeness signals can lead to ethnic stereotyping, with, in this case, Japanese speakers being perceived as "rude." The absence of politeness is generally assumed to mean an unwillingness to be so.

Recent discussion in the literature on L2 pragmatic competence suggests that native speaker norms should not be the yardstick by which learners of English are judged (White, 1993). Dirven and Putz (1993:152) state:

> A major aim of foreign language learning is, then, to become aware of cultural communicative differences, in allowing for different cultural communicative behaviour, in the willingness to accommodate...and to assume that the other participant in the communicative event will do the same.

I would argue, however, that the context, the speaker's goals, and the particular sociopragmatic feature all need to be taken into consideration.

For example, if a Japanese speaker of English needs to use the language to function smoothly, confidently in the Tokyo international business and governmental world, ignorance of minimum pragmatic norms may lead to that person being misperceived and thus unable to achieve his/her professional and interpersonal goals. Furthermore, taking inspiration from Goffman's work, I would suggest that politeness is particularly fraught with danger as it is seen as reflecting maintenance of social harmony and mutual cooperation. Violation of politeness expectations may be an area of pragmatic competence to be avoided.

Clearly, in the best of all possible worlds, all people involved in intercultural communication will be sensitized to differences in pragmatic competence; instead of using the term "pragmatic failure," "pragmatic variation" will be used. However, in the EFL context of Japan, Japanese speakers of English seek to avoid "causing trouble" or attracting negative attention, a strong sociocultural value for Japanese, and, moreover, they wish to avoid speaking "Japanese English," a stigmatized variety. Most want to be bilingual, yet to remain monocultural, motivated by an instrumental orientation only. Thus, to meet the learners' needs, language education needs to equip them with the means to convey politeness which will be crossculturally appropriate (see Kamimoto, 1993).

Therefore, in teaching learners to become communicatively competent, I maintain that there needs to be a pragmatic component. Minimally, I suggest that the learning materials--textbooks included--should raise awareness and teach some basics about politeness in English. This is what is certainly done in teaching Japanese as a second or foreign language and there are supplementary handbooks on how to be polite in Japanese (see Niyekawa, 1991). Japanese learners of English could benefit from the same approach.

Notes

1 My comment is supported by anecdotal evidence from Japanese colleagues.

2 The MOE-mandated textbooks cited above are published in Tokyo as follows:

The Crown English Series. Sanseido
In English Please. Kairyudo.
Mainstream. Zoshindo.
Milestone. Keirinkan.
New Creative Converstion. Daiichi Gakushusha.
New Crystal. Shoseki.
A New Guide to English Conversation . Shoseki.
New Horizon. Shoseki.
Unicorn. Bun-eido.

3 See Mackie, 1983, for a ethnographic study of the L1 acquisition of politeness by Japanese children.

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Subject Index

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